Ramadan Concludes .. What happens now?

The end of Ramadan ushers in one of two major celebrations in the Islamic calendar. A day of festivities called Eid ul Fitr. In Arabic Eid means something which returns and is repeated every certain period of time. The word eid, however, has evolved to mean a festivity. The word Fitr is the root of the word *iftar* (breaking the fast) and denotes the end of the fasting month. It would be wrong to assume that Muslims celebrate the fact that they no longer have to fast, as Muslims indeed
are saddened by the passing of the month of Ramadan. The reality is that Muslims celebrate because God has allowed them to participate in and complete the month of fasting and spiritual reflection. Muslims celebrate the fact that God, in His infinite mercy and wisdom, may accept their deeds and reward them.

"...that you should complete the number [of fasting days] and that you should exalt the greatness of Allah for His having guided you and that you may give thanks." (Quran: 2:185)

The Eid (or celebration) is not carried out in the way you might expect. After the
previous night's moon sighting, indicating that the blessed month of Ramadan is over, Muslims wake for the dawn prayer and the beginning of a very special day. In the early morning Muslims bathe and put on their best clothes in preparation for the special Eid prayer. It has become customary to wear new clothes in celebration of Eid. **"God is beautiful, and He loves that which is beautiful,"**[1] and Eid is a time to display the favours of God. It is an act of worship to eat a few dates before setting out for the prayer in emphasis of the fact that the fasting month has indeed ended, and thus, fasting on the Day of Eid is forbidden, as it is a day of celebration and remembrance of God.

The Eid prayer is to be held outdoors in a large open ground. In inclement weather, or due to a lack of adequate arrangements, Eid prayer is sometimes performed in the mosques. Muslims can be seen walking and driving to the praying area, carrying prayer rugs and glorifying God. His or her words ringing out - "God is great, there is none worthy of worship but God; God is great, Praise be to Him." As Muslim families begin to congregate at the prayer place, the praising of God is joined with words of congratulations such as, "Eid Mubarak" (a celebration full of blessings) and Happy Eid, as well as prayers for each other, "May Allah accept our righteous works". Children dart about in anticipation of gifts and feasts, older people reflect on the success of Ramadan and the Magnificence of God. A quiet hush then spreads across the crowd as the Eid prayer begins. It differs slightly from the normal prayers, and although it is not obligatory, it is highly recommended that Muslims attend. Muslims stand shoulder to shoulder and give thanks to God not only for the joy of Ramadan, but also for the countless blessings He bestows upon us every day.
Before the prayer begins a special charity is to be offered. It is called Zakaat al-Fitr. Each adult Muslim, who is financially able, is expected to offer a small amount, roughly equivalent to $10 U.S, from which foodstuff is bought and distributed to the poor. Ramadan was a time when

Muslims attempt to give generously and the celebration at the conclusion of Ramadan is conducted with the same spirit of generosity, ensuring that all Muslims have the opportunity to enjoy the day with feasting and celebration.

At the end of the prayer the congregation disperses and travels home or onto celebrations via a different route. Muslims try to emulate the guidance of Prophet Muhammad to travel to and from the Eid praying place using different routes. This and the fact of the prayer being held in open areas are done to show the strength of the Muslims, to induce pride on one's faith, and to celebrate the praises of Allah openly. The actual Eid ul Fitr is one day, but in many Muslim countries, businesses and offices may close for up to a week. Due to time constraints and the fact that this Muslim holiday is not always recognised in western countries, some Muslims are unable to participate in more than a few hours of celebration. Muslims in different countries and different families celebrate in different ways.

There are gatherings of family and friends for breakfast, brunch or lunch. It is an occasion for visits, greetings, love and good wishes. It is a time to heal lost bonds, make amends, and revitalize relationships. Special foods are prepared and often dishes are sent to neighbours and friends. Each country or community has its signature dish, and a special benefit to being part of a Muslim community in the west means being able to sample delicious cuisine from around the world. Gifts, money and sweets are usually given to children and some adults exchange gifts too. Celebrations differ from community to community. There are picnics and barbeques, fairs and neighbourhood feasts, community events lasting into the night, and fireworks or laser light displays. New friends are made, old acquaintances renewed and families spend quality time together.

The celebration of Eid demands contact with relatives, kindness to parents, empathy for the poor and distraught and compassion for neighbours. It is a day of visiting and well wishing, and some Muslims take the opportunity to visit the graveyards. It is important not to make visiting the graveyards an annual Eid ritual. However, the remembrance of death and the hereafter is important at all times. Even at this time of celebration, one truly submitted to God understands that we are all but a breath away from death. In the midst of life is death and a Muslim realises that this life is but a transient stop on the way to the final abode - Paradise or Hell. Ramadan was a time of reflection and Eid is a timeof celebration; however, lavish displays of wealth and materialism are to be avoided.

Muslims who seized the benefits inherent in Ramadan are grateful for this time to celebrate and understand it is but one of the ways that God bestows His mercy upon us. Life can sometimes be full of tests and trials, but through the trying times as well as the celebrations God, there is with wisdom, mercy and forgiveness. A Muslim is encouraged to celebrate by glorifying God ,but reminded never to forget that the ability to love life and to celebrate, is but one of God's bounties.